

Advent 3 Sunday Dec 13<sup>th</sup>     How do we show the joy of knowing Jesus ?

This 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of advent which is called Gaudete Sunday . Gaudete means rejoice , we are moving into celebration aspect of Advent . the church is responding to the words in Philippians ch 4 v4 “Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice” . We rejoice because of God’s love for us as seen in Jesus , a love that brings that deep down joy independent of the circumstances we find ourselves in . To rejoice is to be full of JOY at experiencing Jesus and the hope we have of eternal life in him. This third Sunday is about reflecting on how we express that JOY so others experience it..

|Liturgy

Reader One: We want everything to look nice: the decorations of the season, our homes with their lights and tinsel, wreaths and ribbons. We want to lighten the darkness around us, bring beauty to the ugliness that wears us down. We decorate, because it is tradition. Because it lifts our hearts. Because it makes us feel like children again. We deck our halls because company is coming.

Reader Two: The prophet Isaiah smiled when he said, “God will give a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, a mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.” No matter how far we feel from the spirit of the season, God promises to decorate us with love and with joy.

Reader One: We light these candles as a sign of our joy in the beautiful things of this season – not just the things that glitter and flash, but the deeper things, the beauty of the heart and the soul, the beauty of love shared in service and hospitality. We light this candle of joy because company is coming.

Reader Two: O Come, O Come Emmanuel.

stf 169 Come thou long expected Jesus Born to set your people free

Wesley’s Hymn reminds us that Jesus is the joy of every longing heart . In response to the needs generated by Lockdown the Methodist Church has released Advent worship material on the internet entitled “God is with Us” . they are prompting us to remember that Jesus walks with us through the challenges and opportunities of life . We gather as a worshipping community seeking to deepen that relationship with God through Jesus . So we offer up a prayer based upon the Methodist worship material for Advent 3. .Lets pray:-

Loving Lord, as we worship we join with all those who are worshipping this day meeting to praise your name. Whether alone at home, or online, whether in a building or in an open space amongst others. Constrained by circumstances, we lack opportunity to meet each other in love. But we are your people and for that we praise you. Come amongst us generous, hospitable God, where ever we are and welcome us into your loving presence as we come to worship you and offer up our praise . Pour your Holy Spirit into our Hearts so that we continue to grow as your people in all we do. Enable us to praise you in all things , recognise you in the face of the stranger and see you in all that is around us Amen.

we will be reflecting upon the role of John the Baptist in our Christian Journey. John the Baptist with his heart full of joy proclaimed the coming of the long awaited Messiah. The Messiah who would rebuilt the relationship between the people of Israel and God . The gospel reading for this morning is

john 1 v6-9 and 16-27

When we think of John the Baptist there is a certain generation who will start to burst into song in their minds "Prepare yee the way of the Lord " At the start of Godspell as that is sung by John , it is suddenly stopped by a little voice entering the stage saying "ARE YOU LOOKING FOR ME"" . "are you looking for me"

Powerful words from the mouth of the character playing Jesus. Those Words are a question at the heart of our advent reflections as we think of the baby and the second coming. We ask ourselves Just how are we inviting Jesus to be active in our lives.

Advent is about preparation, prayer reflection and waiting . Waiting just like Israel was waiting over 2000 years ago for the coming of the promised Messiah . A messiah predicted in the psalms and by the prophets Isaiah , Micah and Zechariah . Israel had been waiting over

400 + years since God last spoke to them through a prophet.. Then God's messenger appears not in the temple but in the wilderness . A wild man on the fringe of normal society who was pointing the way to the coming of the Son of God.. John was sent to work not in the established church but with the ordinary person in society and at the margins.. John nudges Israel back into a fuller relationship with God. His task was to remove the barriers and walls they had managed to build between themselves and God layer by layer and brick by brick. Barriers created by their human nature which kept God at a distance.

Barrier building between each other and with God seems to be something that we are all still capable of doing today , intentionally or otherwise. We live in the grip of a world wide pandemic which makes us unsure of what the future holds and we even question what God is doing? Such adversity challenges our trust and faith in Jesus making the foundations wobble. But we are all called to walk in God's strength which will enable the Church to be the hands of Jesus at work in the world. At work supporting and helping others to see God by overcoming the same barriers that John was sent to break down . Our role like John's is to grow the family of God enabling the joy of Jesus to be known by all . We are to point people at the Love of God by getting alongside them in their need and being Christ's ambassadors by how we live

When someone is hungry . homeless, shunned by society , emotionally stressed , and living in fear knowing something is missing from their lives then they will struggle to see the relevance of God. Why because the day to day survival dominates all. That is why we as Christians are called to break down the barriers caused by injustices and remove the chains that bind their lives by showing them that all people matter to God.

Today we live in a world where we struggle with that was we feel that we are the victims of circumstances . It is only when we stop and remember that God is with us that our human nature and self pity

which act as Barriers crumble away. The joy and peace of knowing God comes from that personal step of accepting Jesus as Lord and inviting him to be take a full part in whom we are each day and knowing he is with us in all things. Wanting to know Jesus better and focusing on him is important.

John rejected self importance for when he was asked are you he who is to come , he simply quotes Isaiah saying I am merely a voice in the wilderness crying " make straight the way of the Lord" . He moves focus away from himself and onto God and the importance of Jesus . John calls for people to turn back to God and deepening their relationship with him. The outward public sign of Baptism was to show that they had taken that commitment a desire to get to know the coming Messiah. Working on the fringes of society John stresses that The choice was for the individuals to make . They had to invite the Holy Spirit into their hearts to help them on their journey.

. Today methodism is starting to recognise the need to be working at the fringes of society alongside the marginalised. Methodism is asking the Church to get alongside those in need enabling people to get to a point when they can see that God loves them . Being Church is about witnessing in ways that enable people to get to a point were they can make that personal choice of seeking a deeper relationship with God . For all to experience the Love and joy of having Jesus in their lives is what we as church are called to do enable to happen .. But to do that we have to be open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in how we share the Joy of knowing Jesus outside our traditional roles.

The words of Our next hymn reflects upon the effect of inviting the Holy Spirit to guide us as God's people in sharing his love with all. It's a new hymn to me with powerful words

**Hymn: Singing the Faith 369** Baptise us with your Spirit

We offer up our Prayers of confession and thanks

Father we come into your presence knowing that we restrict our response to your call on our lives. You seek to dwell in our hearts and transform us into your people baptising us with your spirit , yet we still fail to speak your name where it is needed, we hold back on sharing your love and compassion putting our needs before your call failing to give you the priority your love for us deserves. Forgive us and change us. Father through Jesus you have promised those that come to you in true repentance are fully forgiven and made new. Father we in this worship claim that forgiveness and praise you for such love. Amen

We continue in prayers of thanks :-All seeing God who walks beside us through life, we give you thanks that you are present in every instant of our life . Throughout all of creation you shows us your glory if we just pause to look , reflect and reach out to you. We give you thanks For the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all who invite you into their hearts. We give thanks for your love like that of a Father tending to the needs of his Children ,Guiding your family forward ,empowering enabling and equipping us to turn challenges into opportunities when we pause and listen to your prompting. We ask that you turn us away from the insistence of self that drives our human nature enabling us to see more clearly what you give and expect of each one of us as we seek to walk with you. Amen

We share together in the Lords Prayer. Our father :

When the early church accepted Jesus , the Messiah , it brought about a change in who they were and what they did which brought them into confrontations with world values. So twenty years before the first Gospel Paul wrote one of the earliest letters ever written about how to live a Christian life .The guidance they received helped them to continue to live a Christ like life . Just as we have to when facing the challenges we are living through today .

We hear 1 Thessalonians 5:14-24 <sup>14</sup> Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone. <sup>15</sup> See that no one

pays back evil for evil, but always try to do good to each other and to all people. <sup>16</sup> Always be joyful. <sup>17</sup> Never stop praying. <sup>18</sup> Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus. <sup>19</sup> Do not stifle the Holy Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Do not scoff at prophecies, <sup>21</sup> but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good. <sup>22</sup> Stay away from every kind of evil.

<sup>23</sup> Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. <sup>24</sup> God will make this happen, for he who calls you is faithful.

That letter is Paul explaining just how it becomes possible to let the joy of knowing Jesus shine out to the world. Paul talks about worship being ongoing 7 days a week. In v16 -18 he talks about "Rejoicing in God's love", "using constant prayer" and "giving thanks" worshipping God in all circumstances. When they were faced by great difficulties they remembering that God was with them was what enabled them gave thanks for his loving presence and moved on in their faith. They were called to pause and prayerfully discerned as a community what God wanted them to do, test things out and be guided by the Holy Spirit. They lived out their lives following the light of Jesus and walking in his footsteps striving to be Holy in every way.

If we are to grow the church family, even when faced by adversity, our lifestyle should show the same joy of knowing Jesus as we rejoice in his love for us. The message for us in this time of challenge is to do the same as Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica. Rejoice, Pray and give thanks. We are to remember in the words of Wesley "Best of all God is with us" and already at work through Jesus in the situations in the world.

If we look around in our current circumstances there are enough clues in the experiences of our everyday life to see Jesus amongst those around us and recognise where he wants us to take the gifts and talents he has given us to use in his service. Part of our Advent reflection has to be to make a conscious effort each and every day to seek his guidance as to

what he is calling us to do? Rejoice in his love for each one of us and invite the Holy Spirit into our hearts each day to guide us and respond joyfully to the situations we find ourselves in being his hands at work .  
Amen

Prayers of intercession Answering God we pray today for all those who have unanswered questions we pray for refugees , displaced people, and for the homeless .We pray for those worried about loss of work, shortage of money, collapse of plans, who ask "what happens now"?

We pray for the lonely, the scared, and the vulnerable who ask "who can help me" We pray for those known to us for whom lockdown and covid has brought great difficulty.

We pray for world leaders that your wisdom and justice may permeate their being.

Answering God, bring your love to these your people in need and help them to see you in their life.

AMEN

We draw this service to a close but not our worship of Jesus as we seek to walk in the light by singing or reflecting upon the words of STF 175 Light of the world.

Hymn: Listen to Singing the Faith 175

    blessing

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with us in this week

May the love of God steer us in our actions this week

and may the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be in our hearts this week

as we live in the world as Christ's hands on Earth AMEN

